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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the current contexts of education and teacher education, describes the Austin Teacher Program's (Austin College, Texas) response to these contexts, and outlines salient features of the Austin Teacher Program redesign. Four common themes emerge from commentary during recent years on the status of American education: increasing external control; changing demographics; attracting quality teachers; and technological impact. The Austin Teacher Program faculty identified external and institutional constraints and influences on policy making and conducted a situation and goal analysis. The conclusions drawn from this process provided direction for redesign of the program and are reflected in the curriculum design and structures developed to support the program. To facilitate planning, a profile of an "Austin Teacher Program Graduate" was devloped. Four constructs were identified as a conceptual framework for guiding the redesign of the program: collaboration, inquiry, reflection, and critique. These constructs are built into each course and field experience of the 5-year program. The courses which make up the curriculum are briefly outlined. (IAH)

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Restructuring Teacher Education: The Austin Teacher Program Response

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Restructuring Teacher Education:
The Austin Teacher Program Response

Preparing beginning teachers for this decade and into the 21st century is a challenge the teacher education department at Austin College takes seriously. The Austin Teacher Program has been a leader in the field of teacher education since the late 1960's, when the vision and creativity of Dr. Virginia Love and Dr. Bill Freeman led to the creation of the Austin Teacher Program (ATP). The hallmarks of the program (liberal arts based, extensive field-experiences, and five-years) have become common recommendations for improving teacher education. Major reports and studies on teacher education such as the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education, The Carnegie Forum's A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century, and the Holmes Group's Tomorrow's Teachers have recommended reforms that were instituted at Austin College two decades ago.

Teachers of today, however, are entering a different teaching profession than those who graduated twenty years ago. To ensure that the graduates of the Austin Teacher Program are prepared for the demands of teaching in this decade and into the 21st century, the faculty engaged in a strategic planning process in 1989 and 1990 to determine the ideal teacher education program for Austin College students of the 1990's.

This paper summarizes the current contexts of education and teacher education, describes the Austin Teacher Program's response, and outlines salient features of the Austin Teacher Program redesign.

The Current Education Context

From the extensive commentary during the recent years about the status of the American educational system (Bowyer, 1983; Brandwein, 1981; Goodlad, 1987; McLaren, 1986; Sizer, 1984; Smith, 1986) four common themes emerged.

The first theme is that of **increasing external control**. Under the guise of improving education, mandates and directives from legislatures and accrediting agencies are increasing. Such directives engender one of two broad responses: teaching to a common, minimum standard or teaching determined by curricular decision-making. In the former, the focus is on teaching and testing. Apple and Teitelbaum (1986) warned of the dangers inherent in an exclusive emphasis on content and methods. Comparing education to the labor process, they described the current status of education in terms of "degradation of labor." Two consequences are the "separation of conception from execution" and the resulting "de-skilling" of teachers. The final result is the loss of rights and powers which have taken teachers decades to gain.

In the latter, the curricular decision-making model, teachers are empowered to use their professional knowledge to determine appropriate curricular objectives while keeping in mind those identified by external sources. Curriculum in such classes is not limited to a minimum nor is the learning fragmented according to pre-determined objectives.

Empowerment is a rallying cry banded about as a counter to the encroaching controls. Empowerment, however, is more than curricular decision-making. Altwerger (1989)

describes empowerment at two levels: personal and social. At a personal level, empowerment refers to the taking care of one's own professional life--a personal liberation through struggle. At a social level, empowerment involves the moral responsibility to develop critical skills--to critique real life issues. True empowerment is much more far-reaching than curricular decision-making. Empowerment at the social level moves education out of the context of the classroom and even beyond the educational system to society.

A second theme is that of **changing demographics.** Again this theme includes a two-level response. At the lower level, is the issue of the teacher's ability to work with culturally diverse students and the concomitant need for cultural awareness. (Burstein & Cabello, 1989; McDiarmed, 1989) But beyond this is the struggle for democracy, the notion of developing voice and critical thought, and thus the transforming of learners. (Giroux & McLaren, 1986; Shor & Freire, 1997)

A third theme is the need for **attracting quality teachers.** Two broad areas impact this theme: first, the gender issue; and second, the perception of teaching. Traditionally, teaching has been considered a female role, particularly at the elementary level. For young men to enter education it is often a sacrifice both in terms of monetary reward and social status. Today a wider range of careers is open to females so that bright, young women choosing to enter education are doing so with the same sacrifice as their male peers. Moreover, the perception of teaching as that of being a technician responding to external authorities is not attractive to the ablest young people who desire to use their creative abilities and to exercise the broad discretion and decision-making powers normally characteristic of professional status. (Woodward, 1986)

A fourth theme is that of the **technological impact.** Computers have the potential to reform teaching as we know today. The advent of CD ROM, interactive video, networking, data bases, electronic bulletin boards, and low cost desktop publishing have powerful portent. Teachers of tomorrow will need to be more than minimally literate with computers if they expect to remain effective. The future impact of modern technology is truly in its infancy in teacher education.

The Current Teacher Education Context

A look at current issues in teacher education extends the themes discussed previously. Teacher education is at a crossroads. On one hand there are calls for the demise of teacher education as seen in recent legislative moves toward dismantling Colleges of Education and the creation of alternatives routes to certification that virtually bypass traditional institutions. (Gursky, 1989) On the other hand there are calls for teacher education to focus more on the intellectual and philosophical development of prospective teachers in order to avoid the erosion of the intellectual foundations of the public schools as a result of convergent, uniform and predetermined goals. (Johnston, 1984).

Another issue is that of teacher training versus teacher education. As early as 1930, Henry W. Holmes, Dean of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, expressed concern with the National Survey of the Education of Teachers which viewed teachers as routine workers under the direction of principals and supervisors rather than supporting teachers as critical thinkers. Holmes was convinced that if teachers' work continued to be defined in such narrow fashion, schools of education would eventually respond by limiting themselves to teaching the "folkways of teaching," forms of training that would virtually

undermine the development of teachers as critically-minded intellectuals. (Giroux & McLaren, 1986)

Another more pervasive concern related to the perpetuation of the "folkways of teaching" is the relationship between schooling and democracy. In a poignant article, "Teacher Education and the Politics of Engagement: The Case for Democratic Schooling," Giroux and McLaren (1986) present schooling as part of an ongoing struggle for democracy and call for teachers to assume the role of "transformative intellectuals." In this role teachers "treat students as critical agents, question how knowedge is produced and distributed, utilize dialogue, and make knowledge meaningful, critical, and ultimately emancipatory." (p. 215) They advocate the reconstructing of teacher education programs around a new vision of democratic schooling and teaching for critical citizenship. Fundamental to such a curriculum would be the critical study of power, language, culture, and history, along with a critical pedagogy that values student experience and student voice.

The Austin Teacher Program Response

In a retreat in August of 1989, the Austin Teacher Program faculty engaged in dialogue about future directions for teacher education at Austin College. Utilizing a plan adapted from Short's (1987) "Curriculum Decision Making in Teacher Education: Policies, Program Development, and Design," the faculty identified external and institutional constraints and influences on policy making; and conducted a situation and goal analysis. Included in this analysis was data from a major survey of ATP alumni conducted in 1987 and 1988. The conclusions drawn from this review provided direction for the redesign. These conclusions, listed below, are reflected in the curriculum design and the structures developed to support the program.

1. The vast majority of ATP students are of traditional college age, of the majority culture group, and have had limited world experiences. Thus they need a deeper understanding of broader social and political contexts of American society.

2. For our students to become effective, emerging teachers and to continue their growth toward becoming curricular decision-makers, we must promote the development of the following attitudes and abilities: an ability to inquire and reflect, a sense of efficacy, the taking of a critical stance, the making of defensible choices, and the taking of deliberate actions.

3. Given the changing demographics of the state of Texas, it is essential that we focus attention on developing within the ATP students an appreciation of cultural diversity and an understanding of the implications of diversity for instruction. Strong consideration should be given to the study of Spanish for fulfillment of the foreign language requirement.

4. It is important that ATP students develop a holistic sense of teaching/learning by examining critical pedagogy, democractic schooling, and the purposes of education.

5. It is important that ATP students develop a strong content pedagogical knowledge base--the blending of content knowledge with pedagogical knowledge.

6. It is important that ATP faculty provide models of teaching strategies we desire the students to use in their teaching.

7. Given the strong influence of supervising teachers on the students' development as teachers, attention must be given to recruiting and working with effective supervising teachers.

8. Given the developmental nature of the ATP, we should be aware of individual faculty members' strengths as supervisors and determining course assignments accordingly.

9. Attention must be given to the realities of teaching and to the perceived disparity between the reflective practitioner mode, as represented in teacher education, and the professional standards mode, as often represented by traditional teachers.

10. For the teaching experiences of the ATP students to be as effective as possible, there must be a collaborative involvement between the ATP and interested school districts.

11. For the preparation of teachers to be as effective as possible, it is important that the education of teachers be viewed as a collaborative effort between teacher education and the arts and sciences.

To further facilitate the planning we developed a profile of an "Austin Teacher Program Graduate." While we realize no two graduates are the same, nor would we want clones, there are common characteristics we desire our graduates to possess.

The ATP attempts to develop an emerging teacher who:

1. has a strong, beginning knowledge of subjects.

2. is aware of, appreciates, and accommodates the pluralistic nature of our society.

3. understands, appreciates and accommodates diverse intellectual and emotional needs.

4. is knowledgeable of the ends, purposes and values of education and of the often conflicting viewpoints regarding these.

5. understands that teaching and learning are collaborative processes.

6. demonstrates the characteristics of reflective practice.

7. recognizes the need for and strives to apply the best professional judgment.

8. seeks to share in responsibility for and to participate in educational policy decisions.

9. takes pride in being a teacher!

In order to enable our students to move toward these goals and to lay the groundwork for our graduates to continue their development as emerging teachers we identified the constructs of **collaboration, inquiry, reflection,** and **critique** as a conceptual framework for guiding the redesign of the Austin Teacher Program.

After this extensive review, the teacher education faculty affirmed the original philosophy of the ATP, but at the same time mandated significant changes in the content and methodology. Included in this reaffirmation was a commitment to continue a five-year

program which includes a professional, graduate year and culminates in a Master's degree and certification.

Foundational Constructs

The constructs of collaboration, inquiry, reflection and critique provide the general parameters for the program and are the tools to be developed, thus enabling our graduates to continue their development as emerging teachers. While there is considerable inter-relatedness so that in practice these concepts become recursive, a brief description of each one individually is appropriate in order to clarify the potential power of such a preparation.

Collaboration recognizes the social nature of learning and power of the collective community of which we find ourselves a part. The community learns together. While the professor is the more experienced member of the community, all members grow from the exchange of ideas. For this to happen, there must be an atmosphere of trust, openness and shared vulnerability, and shared ownership of the actual course.

Teaching is not a skill to be arrived at, but rather it is a craft which is always developing. **Inquiry** is necessary in order to respond to novel situations to make one's own discoveries. Learning to pose questions and to seek answers is crucial in order for teachers to respond to the complexities of teaching and to direct their continued growth.

Just as inquiry is necessary for self-directed growth so is **reflection.** Through reflection one engages in a disciplined analysis including generating alternatives and thereby brings to a conscious level a more in-depth understanding of a situation or an action. Reflection does require objectivity and candor.

Critique extends thoughtful reflection to critical examination of one's own teaching, the curriculum, the experiences of students, the context of the school, and the issues of schooling and its role in society. Critique elicits the ethical and moral dimensions involved in teaching. The ability to engage in critique is essential for a teacher to make a difference in society and is necessary for the future of democracy.

The Austin Teacher Program Curriculum

Collaboration, inquiry, reflection and critique are built into each course and field experience through readings and response activities, various writing assignments, and collaborative projects. The faculty member's role becomes that of a mediator, facilitating students' development by designing experiences to assist the students in further developing their notion of what it means to be a professional educator. For many students being encouraged to construct their own meaning rather than just receiving a body of knowledge, represents a new approach to learning.

One of the advantages of a five-year program is that students have time to develop a pedagogical base by being involved in a variety of carefully planned learning and teaching experiences. The integrated educational program resulting from the collaborative effort by the faculty, transcends the common fragmentation of individual courses and thus enhances the value of the developmental approach. Integration extends to the multiple uses of technology which are incorporated throughout the courses, either as teaching methods, or as learning projects for students. "Guiding questions" identify the focus of each course and are intended to demonstrate the dynamic nature of learning while facilitating students'

growth toward becoming professional educators.

Gordon's (1974) skill development ladder serves well to describe professional growth in the art of teaching, and provides a framework for understanding the organization of the ATP and for appreciating the value of a five year, developmental program. Gordon describes this growth as progressing, from the "unconsciously unskilled," to "consciously unskilled," to "consciously skilled," to "unconsciously skilled."

In the first course, **Schools and Society**, students are confronted with the complexities of education thus making them aware of being "consciously unskilled" in the broad area of education. This awareness is further developed in the second course, **The Learner-Teacher Interaction**, during which students observe and experience for themselves the dynamics of teaching and thereby become aware of being "consciously unskilled." In the third course, **The Learner, the Teacher, The Curriculum**, the students begin to make the transition from being "consciously unskilled" to being "consciously skilled" in regard to the selection and instruction of specific content. Supervisory conferences during field experiences provide valuable opportunities for inquiry, reflection and critique and serve as a catalyst for the students' continued growth.

In the graduate year, students engage in academic and professional studies focused on teaching. The graduate courses provide the breadth and depth of content needed by beginning professionals. Educational Foundations, and Research and Assessment are core courses required of all students. The ATP offers two courses specifically for students in secondary education. **Secondary Instruction** (by discipline) addresses the need for teachers to have a strong content teaching expertise and focuses on the development of content pedagogical knowledge. **Secondary Education** focuses on the major issues in secondary education and provides for an understanding of the total secondary education culture. Courses for students in elementary education reflect the basic curricular areas: **Reading and Writing: Process, Development and Teaching, Mathematics in the Elementary School,** and **Science and Social Studies in the Elementary School.** While these are listed as discrete courses, the emphasis throughout the Program is on an integrated approach and this continues to be reflected in these courses. Included in the graduate program is one semester of full-time teaching. The graduate teaching experience fosters the students' development toward becoming "unconsciously skilled" and functioning as professional educators.

The Austin Teacher Program and the 1990's

Obviously there are challenges for teacher education in the 1990's, but the faculty of the Austin Teacher Program view the challenges as an opportunity to make a difference. We have set forth a progressive agenda for fostering within our graduates a sense of true empowerment and, thereby, hope to impact society as well as teacher education and education.

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